

Shebnañ Rich House  
Longnook Road  
Truro  
Barnstable County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-764

HABS  
MASS,  
I-TRU,  
43-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS  
MASS,  
1-TRU,  
43 -

SHEBNAH RICH HOUSE

HABS No. MA-764

Located on the north side of Longnook Road one mile east of U.S. Highway 6 in Truro, Barnstable County, Massachusetts.

Building number 13-7 in Cape Cod National Seashore.

Owner: Mrs. William J. L'Engle,  
130 East 67th Street, New York, New York

Use: Summer residence

Date of erection: ca. 1810.

This is an example of a traditional Cape Cod "house-and-a-half" now considerably modified. It was the birthplace, and later summer residence, of Truro's historian Shebnaah Rich. It is classified a historic structure in Cape Cod National Seashore.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The date of construction of this house has been determined by visual appraisal, corroborated by known events in the life of the first owner. The structure of the building is still partially exposed in the attic, where can be seen the hewn timber trusses and purlins which are found in traditional plank construction on Lower Cape Cod until about 1820. In addition to this pre-1820 evidence, there is in the "east room" a mantel consisting of pilasters and entablature with reeded diamonds and center oval, thus suggesting the Federal style and a date of ca. 1810/15. The fireplace wall in the "east room" is apparently the only unaltered original woodwork in the house. The mantel and the roof structure are both similar to the corresponding elements in the nearby Jedediah Higgins House, also dated ca. 1810. (The Jedediah Higgins House, Truro, is also in HABS; it is building no. 13-13 in Cape Cod National Seashore.) Therefore, on structural and stylistic evidence, the Shebnaah Rich House can be dated ca. 1810.

The estimated date of erection is also corroborated by known events in the life of the original owner, Shebnaah Rich (1782-1843). He married Belinda Higgins in 1808, and apparently his house was built soon after that date. His widow continued to live in the house after his death; and on the "Map of the Counties of Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket, Massachusetts," published by Henry F. Walling, New York, 1858, the house is indicated by the name Mrs. B. Rich.

The younger Shebnaah Rich, the historian of Truro, was born in this house in 1824. After the death of his mother he owned the house, which is indicated S. Rich in the Atlas of Barnstable County, Massachusetts (Boston, 1880), p. 76. The younger Shebnaah Rich (1824-1907) was a broker in leather goods; however, he is remembered for his history, Truro-Cape Cod, or Land Marks and Sea Marks, which was published in Boston in 1883, followed by a second printing dated 1884. Shebnaah Rich used the old homestead as a summer house, which he called "Longnook," after the eighteenth-century name of the hollow in which it stands. It was he who thus revived the name Longnook Hollow, which is in use today. During most of the nineteenth century Longnook Hollow was known as Dyer Hollow.

The younger Shebnaah Rich's widow, Delia (Knowles) Rich, sold the house in 1923 to the artist William L'Engle (1885-1957), who occupied it as a summer residence. William L'Engle was an early member of the Provincetown Art Association, and like several other resident painters chose to live in Truro. Among them was Arthur Musgrave, who lived just across Longnook Road in the Joshua Rich House (in HABS as the Rich-Musgrave House, consisting of historic buildings no. 13-8 and no. 17-85 in Cape Cod National Seashore). The artists of Provincetown and Truro are mentioned in much of the later literature of the Lower Cape; for example, see Katherine Smith and Edith Shay, Down the Cape (1936), p. 174. Since the death of William L'Engle the house has been owned by his widow, Mrs. Lucy L'Engle, who continues to occupy it as a summer residence.

The preceding chronology was largely derived from information supplied by Mrs. L'Engle, who knew Mrs. Shebnaah Rich (widow of the historian), and by Miss Marion Rich, grandniece of the historian Shebnaah. Miss Rich lives off Castle Road in Truro. She owns an annotated copy of Rich's history and a number of old photographs, letters and other memorabilia of the Rich family.

One of the photographs owned by Miss Marion Rich was copied for HABS. It shows the Shebnaah Rich house from the west ca. 1890. Also copied for HABS is a view of the house from the southwest, from the woodcut appearing in Rich, Truro-Cape Cod, facing p. 464, and entitled "Summer Home of the Author, at Longnook." These two views indicate the principal changes in the house, which were effected by the younger Shebnaah Rich before 1880.

The house was originally a "house-and-a-half" facing south on Longnook Road. Shebnaah Rich moved the entrance from the south front to the west side, so that one enters the small "west room." The interior of the "west room" was completely altered by the reconstruction of the mantel and the panelling of the walls with woodwork from an eighteenth century house (now unknown). The "east room" was allowed

to remain essentially in its original state, and its mantel has been discussed above. The two doors in the north wall of the "east room," one originally giving into the kitchen and the other into the small eastern bedroom commonly called the "boring room," were removed and an opening the width of double-doors remains. The partition separating the "boring room" from the original kitchen was removed, and a new partition (running north and south) was constructed in line with the face of the fireplace wall in the "east room." This provided Shebnah Rich a new dining room with a wide opening into the parlor, or "east room." The west wall of the new dining room was finished with the panelling of a fireplace wall (bolection moldings) from an unknown eighteenth century house, perhaps the same one that provided the panelling in the "west room." Evidently the historian was attempting to preserve the fragments of an old house and add antiquarian interest to his own. His new wall intersects the fireplace and cupboard arrangement of the original kitchen, so that the old kitchen cupboard is now in the southwest corner of the dining room, while the old kitchen fireplace and mantel are now in the small northwest room, which was created by the construction of the new partition.

The younger Shebnah Rich also extended the house by the construction of a two-storied ell on the north, for a kitchen below and a bedroom above. Behind the ell was built a small extension of one story. These additions show in the two old views mentioned above. After 1923 Mr. and Mrs. L'Engle added a second story, for a bathroom, to the small one-story extension. Otherwise they left the house essentially as the younger Shebnah Rich had remodeled it. The porches showing on the east and west sides in the old views have been removed.

Mr. L'Engle converted into a studio the late-nineteenth-century barn standing on the hillside north of the house. A garage standing on the premises in 1923 he converted into a picture gallery.

Prepared by:

*Ernest Allen Connally*

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August, 1962

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### SHEBNAH RICH HOUSE

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### PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Shebnaah Rich House is a one and a half story Cape Cod "house-and-a-half" covered with wood shinglee and surrounded by residential landscaping. This rectangular building faces south with its main entrance now on the west and a two story ell to the north. This wood house is in excellent condition, but the interior has been greatly altered. It was at one time the home of Shebnaah Rich, the Truro historian.

The construction of the house is plank walls with shingles directly on the exterior and plaster directly on the interior. The frame is post and beam. The gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles and has a box cornice. The construction of the roof is hewn trusses and planks running perpendicular to the ridge in the manner used on Cape Cod before 1820. The house has red brick underpinnings. There are small red brick stoops at all doors. There is one chimney in the center of the main house and one in the north ell.

The main entrance was at the center of the south front of the building, but this has been removed and a new entry was put on the center of the west side of the main house. The windows have 12/8 light eash. The second floor has 6/6 light double hung sash. The north ell has some 9/6 light sash. The house has painted wood exterior blinds.

The second floor of the house has one large dormer in the south face of the roof - this is not original.

The first floor of the main house has been changed enough to be very little like a typical Cape Cod "house-and-a-half." There is a small entry hall and stair in the western portion of the house. The southeast room is the only one in the house that retains its original featuree. There are three other rooms in the first floor of the main house. The second floor of the main house and the ell is broken up into bedrooms. The modern kitchen is in the north ell.

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The main house has one stair running from the west entry to the center of the second floor.

The flooring is random width planking and is painted yellow. The walls and ceilings are plastered. There is wainscoting in the primary rooms and there is panelling in the southwest rooms which is probably second hand. There is a variety of doors in the house - some of them are four and some six panels. All doors have iron lift latches. There is a great variety of painted wood trim.

The house has modern electric lighting and central heating.

There is a small modern wood fence to the west of the house. There are several modern outbuildings - a garage, a dog house and a studio.

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